

Project Title

Harlequins Big Game

Category

Museums, Galleries, Events & Visitor Attractions

Client Company

Harlequin Football Club

Design Consultancy

Minale Tattersfield

Current Date

22 May 2009



Minale Tattersfield



The winning pitch consisted of creating a powerful brand that could carry and drive the whole campaign.

Executive summary

Harlequins is one of Rugby Union's premier clubs with a long and illustrious history dating from 1866. The decision was made by its chief executive to stage a major rugby match just after Christmas 2008. It would be a Guinness Premiership match between Harlequins and Leicester Tigers and would take place at the England national stadium at Twickenham instead of their usual home ground.

Normally, Harlequins home games take place at their ground which has a maximum capacity of 12,700 but for the Twickenham game they would need to sell 50,000 tickets. It was a huge risk but if they succeeded there would be significant commercial benefits as well as an enhanced reputation.

A powerful promotional campaign was needed in order to sell the required number of seats. The entire promotional budget was set at £125,000 and included in this was £25,000 for the design of the promotional material. Minale Tattersfield won the pitch to design the promotional material that would be used for posters, press advertisements and relevant websites.

We felt that a big match needed a big brand and this brand became the heart of the campaign as well as at the heart of our designs. For our brand which we named, The Big Game, we created a very iconic visual identity redolent of the Hollywood epics. We then designed the posters and press advertisements and these designs were applied to various websites.

The campaign succeeded in its target of filling all the seats and went on to win the Sports Industry Awards 2009 for the Best Integrated Sport Marketing Campaign. Plans are already in place to stage Big Game 2 featuring the existing identity. It is planned that The Big Game will become a regular Christmas fixture over the years to come.



One of the key messages was the excellent value. Two great teams, one great venue all for just £10.

Project overview

1. Outline of the brief

The brief was very simple. Design the promotional material that will attract 50,000 spectators to a rugby game at Twickenham Stadium between Harlequins and Leicester Tigers instead of the usual 12,700 or less.

The budget did not give us the luxury of designing a large series of posters or press advertisements. There would be no teaser campaigns, no tv campaigns, so the advertisements had to hit the spot immediately and work hard. There would be press adverts in the Evening Standard and some relevant local newspapers. There would be posters placed at some local stations and at Waterloo as well as some street posters and sides of buses.

We had to communicate a very simple proposition in a very simple way. There were two great teams, a great rugby game, at the famous Twickenham Stadium and all for £10.00. We had to communicate that proposition in a very clear and forceful way.

2. Description

The chief executive of Harlequin Football Club had been impressed by the efforts of a French club, Stade Francais, to stage rugby matches at the national Stade de France ground instead of their usual home ground. Such matches regularly attracted a crowd of 80,000 instead of their usual crowd of 12,000 at their home ground in Stade Jean Bouin in Paris. English rugby football needed such an event to showcase the best of Rugby Union and to attract supporters to the game. If Harlequins could themselves stage such a match it would greatly enhance their reputation and bring commercial benefits in terms of increased attendances, sponsorship opportunities, hospitality bookings and merchandise sales.

2. Description - cont.

So it was planned that a Guinness Premiership match between Harlequins and Leicester Tigers would take place on 27 December 2009. Instead of the match being played at the Harlequins home ground, the Twickenham Stoop, it would take place at the national Twickenham Stadium, just down the road.

For the game to be viable 50,000 tickets had to be sold. This was a tough challenge as the Harlequins home ground, the Stoop, had a maximum capacity of 12,700.



For rugby fans it is all about the players.
The 48 sheet posters were simple but very effective.

3. Overview of market

Rugby supporters are rather different to their football counterparts. Football supporters can be relied on to passionately support their club in every game, wherever that takes place and to support other activities. Rugby supporters are rather more laid back and rugby often has to take a back seat to other activities, sporting or otherwise.

We therefore had to take into account the following considerations:

- The Harlequins and Leicester Tigers sides could not be relied upon by themselves to bring enough people out after Christmas. There had to be the lure of a great, unmissable sporting event to bring out the crowds.
- The promotional material should appeal to all rugby fans and better still to all sporting fans in south west London.
- It was to be hoped that the game would become a permanent post Christmas feature so the brand and messages had to be relevant for future matches.
- Traditionally, the post Christmas sporting events are football and horse racing so The Big Game would have to break that tradition.



4. Project launch date

The Big Game would be announced to the sporting press at a press conference at the end of August 2008. The visual identity had to be ready by then and we designed the banners to sit on the rostrum at the press conference. A specially designed website featuring our designs had to go live also at the end of August and the press and poster adverts would start appearing in mid September. It was hoped that by mid December virtually all the tickets would be sold. By Christmas eve it would all be over when it would be known whether all the tickets had been sold.

5. Size of design budget

There was a very limited budget. £25,000 was allocated to the design of the promotional material including the brand identity which had to include all photography and any other costs. A further £100,000 was allocated to PR support and media buying (poster sites, newspapers, magazines etc) as well as ticket sales consultancy.

6. Outline of design solution

Our solution put the brand at the heart of the campaign. We had to create a name and a corresponding visual identity which conveyed the fact that this was a match out of the ordinary. This was a game not to be missed.

Our inspiration came from the Hollywood blockbusters of yesteryear. In our pitch presentation to the client we alluded to the fact that we had to create a sense of an event similar to the chariot race in Ben Hur. This was a game of epic proportions, in rugby terms anyway. Once we had won the project we developed the epic theme and created the typography to match that used in the Ben Hur poster, although we brought it up to date.



Banners and skyscrapers were placed on partner websites to direct interest to both ticketmaster.com and the Harlequin's website.



The Evening Standard carried The Big Game campaign for one week before the match.

6. Outline of design solution - cont.

The identity does not include any Harlequin design cues. That would alienate the opposing team (Leicester Tigers in this case) and might put off supporters of other London rugby clubs. We did make the identity particular to rugby though by dotting the "i" with a rugby ball. So it became an identity that could be embraced by all rugby lovers and could be used on all future similar Big Game matches.

The poster and press advertisements had to communicate the key points of the appeal of the match. These were that you got to experience the unique atmosphere of Twickenham Stadium, that it was a great family fun day out and that you got to see two of the heavyweight teams of English rugby and all for £10.00.

For the posters and press adverts simplicity and boldness of design were key. One of the main posters of the campaign featured an aerial view of the stadium with the caption, "all this for £10.00". Another of the main posters featured two prominent players from each side. Another poster featured family members watching the game in rapt attention.

A web site was designed specially for the match which featured the identity as well as some of the design elements we had created. The Big Game identity also appeared on other websites where tickets could be bought. The three main designs were then adapted for size to suit the various poster sites (on buses, stations, streets etc) and the newspaper adverts.



4 – 7 Summary of results

Increase in sales

The campaign succeeded in its aim of attracting a crowd of 50,000 to a rugby game that would normally have expected to attract just under 13,000, a nearly fourfold increase. The local authorities and transport authorities decreed that there should be a cap on 50,000 ticket sales because there would not be the transport infrastructure (given that it was the day after Boxing Day) to support any more spectators than that to the match. The 50,000 ticket sales were achieved 3 – 4 days before the match took place. On the day of the match a lock-out had to apply to all those fans that turned up at the gate hoping to buy tickets.

Enhancement of profile

The 50,000 ticket sales target was achieved thus securing the commercial objective. This was not the only objective for the match however. It was hoped that by staging such a match that Harlequins would greatly increase their profile in the rugby world in particular and the sporting world in general. The results in this area exceeded all expectations. A day after the match the Observer gave a whole front page to the match in its sports section. So too did The Sunday Telegraph and The Sunday Times. The club has considerably increased its standing in the sporting press and in all sections of the sporting community.

Other commercial considerations

Clubs such as Harlequins derive substantial revenue from commercial sponsors and the sale of branded merchandise. The sponsors of Harlequins were delighted with the results and they derived an increase in exposure of their brand due to the high level of interest generated from The Big Game. This will strengthen Harlequin's hand when it comes to entering into future sponsorship agreements and will also drive sales of Harlequin branded merchandise in the months and years to come.

Charity sales

Cancer Research was the official charity partner for The Big Game. They were to benefit from the profit on the sale of specially designed rugby shirts which would be worn by the Harlequin players. These shirts would feature the Cancer Research colours and logo as well as the Harlequin pattern. In fact the entire quantity of these specially designed shirts, 5,000 in all, were sold much to the delight and benefit of Cancer Research.

Staff morale

The success of The Big Game has been a considerable morale booster to the players. It has also given increased confidence to the support staff at Harlequins. It is their job to go out and sell tickets at their home ground and to sell the various hospitality packages, viewing boxes, advertising packages, sponsorship and all the other commercial elements of the club. It has enabled them to market the club more aggressively which will have an impact on their profit margins in the months and years to come.

Future direction of the club

The great success of The Big Game is already having an impact on the plans for the future of the club. The directors and shareholders have an increased sense of confidence in the club and are already planning to develop it further (although detailed plans are confidential at this stage).

One element of the plan that is not confidential is that The Big Game 2 scheduled for December 27 at Twickenham Stadium is already in the planning stage. This time the authorities have relented and will allow a greater number of tickets to be sold. So the target for The Big Game 2 will be 80,000.

Industry recognition for the success of the The Big Game

The sports sector has already recognised the huge achievement of The Big Game. The 2009 Sport Industry Awards which took place on 30 April in front of an audience of sporting celebrities and high profile industry figures gave Harlequins the award for 'Best Integrated Sport Marketing Campaign' for their promotion of the Guinness Premier League match against Leicester Tigers.



An early concept for the next Big Game scheduled for the 27 December 2009

The word from our client

Our client Harlequin Football Club is delighted with the work done by Minale Tattersfield and their part in achieving such a huge success for The Big Game.

“We had 7 companies pitch for the work of promoting our match. The designs from Minale Tattersfield stood head and shoulders above those from the other agencies and all who participated in the selection agreed whole heartedly that Minale Tattersfield should be given the job. Their final identity and designs encapsulated everything that we wanted to deliver from a sales, marketing and brand development perspective. Our message was to be all about Harlequins, rugby, Twickenham and big. The Minale Tattersfield design solution delivered on that handsomely with very simple but direct and hard hitting communication. Their designs contributed decisively to the success of The Big Game and in the terrific results which surpassed our expectations.”

Julian Gent

Seles Manager
Harlequin Football Club



The team collecting “Best Integrated Campaign” at 2009 Sport Industry Award. Left to right: Marcello Minale (Minale Tattersfield), Chemmy Alcott (Team GB - Skiing), Simon Marjoram (Goeff Howe), Mark Evans (Harlequins CEO), Stuart Dalrymple (Goodform) and Jo Jackson (Team GB - Swimming).

8. Other influencing factors

It should be said that, as in all successful projects, there are a number of factors which contribute to success. This is true in the case of The Big Game. Harlequins were very brave in their decision to mount such a big match. Their very braveness was mentioned at the Sport Industry Awards.

Other companies also played a part. The media buying was done by Geoff Howe Marketing Communications. They ensured the maximum effectiveness of the media buying. Goodform Ltd was retained as specialised sporting sales consultants and employed their experience to provide the optimum ticket sales strategy.